

61 schools earn Red Carpet Awards for being family-friendly, having quality customer service

COLUMBIA – Sixty-one schools were honored today with Red Carpet awards to recognize their success at creating family-friendly school environments and providing excellent customer service.

State Superintendent of Education Jim Rex announced the winners of this year's awards, which have become highly prized by South Carolina schools. The schools will receive actual red carpets to display in their lobbies.

"When parents and citizens feel welcome at a school, when they feel comfortable, then they're much more likely to provide the support that school needs in order to succeed," said State Superintendent of Education Jim Rex. "This year, these 61 schools set the standard in South Carolina for making visitors feel like they're part of the family."

Nearly 270 schools applied for the award last fall. Applicants provided written details about their family-friendly philosophies and environments, along with the methods used to self-evaluate those efforts. They also were required to include copies of their schools' communication plans.

Schools that passed the written application phase were then screened by independent judges who rated how telephone callers and visitors were treated. Judges did not identify themselves during telephone calls or site visits, and site visits were not announced in advance.

Winning schools receive red carpets with the state seal to display in their lobbies, and they maintain their recognition status for a three-year period.

This year's recipients include 41 elementary schools, 10 middle schools, nine high schools and one child development center.

"There's a huge variety among this year's winners," Rex said, "and that goes to show that a determined group of people can create a positive atmosphere in any school setting anywhere in South Carolina. It's all about involving parents and community members in what we're trying to accomplish."

Red Carpet Coordinator Frank White said the program continues to generate considerable interest, as evidenced by this year's 269 applications.

"Generally about one in every four schools applies for the award each year," White said. "That shows that schools recognize the critical role that parent and

community support plays in their success. There's a lot of interest out there in improving customer service skills."

Members of the South Carolina chapter of the National School Public Relations Association (SC/NSPRA), and staff from the Department of Education, Communities in Schools and current Red Carpet Schools volunteered to take part in the judging process.

"Positive relationships between school leaders, teachers, students, parents, staff, and the community are instrumental in supporting high student achievement," said SC/NSPRA President Oby G. Lyles. "SC/NSPRA is proud to support the Education Department's efforts to evaluate customer service and communications efforts by schools vying for Red Carpet School status."

A live teleconference featuring the principals of three Red Carpet Schools from 2005-06 was broadcast to all schools last fall; it included a question-and-answer period and video tours of award-winning schools.

The Red Carpet Schools initiative was one of only two programs in the nation to receive a Distinguished Single Project Award from the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA) in 2003. The program has also been featured in NSPRA's monthly newsletter as well as the monthly newsletter of the National Elementary Principals Association.

Across the state, Red Carpet schools show many examples of family and community-friendly programs:

Blaney Elementary in Kershaw County holds Family Fun Night on the first Monday of each month. Dinner is provided, and the computer lab, media center and the Parent Resource Center are open. Students and parents can check out and return library books, take Accelerated Readers tests, work in the computer lab or work on a project for class. Parents can check out games, books and videos.

At Delmae Heights Elementary School in Florence School District One, parents are encouraged to be active school volunteers. The school's "Three for Me" program has the goal of having each student's parents volunteer at least three hours during the school year.

Alma Elementary School in Cherokee County is located in front of the local fire department. The school's cafeteria is open to the firefighters who regularly eat lunch with the students. Teachers often take students to the fire department for lessons in character education, careers and fire safety.

Walhalla Middle School in Oconee County holds family fitness nights when families play games together and learn to live healthier lifestyles. Business partners Gold's Gym and Curves conduct aerobic exercise classes, and representatives from DHEC, the Wellness Center and Tobacco Free offer information about good health and conduct blood pressure and vision screenings.

Because Dorman High's Freshman Campus in Spartanburg School District Six serves deaf students from the South Carolina School for the Deaf and Blind, the school has a hearing assistance system that's available to help hearing-impaired visitors.

Wade Hampton High School in Hampton School District One moved the attendance office and the bookkeeper's office to just inside the school's main entrance and replaced smaller

signs with larger ones that were easier to read as a result of feedback from parents and others in the community.

At Lakewood Elementary School in Horry County, the assistant principal makes a daily practice of boarding buses to greet students in the mornings and to wish them a good afternoon as they are leaving. Lakewood's principal lists both his school and home telephone numbers in the school's handbook and states that he welcomes calls at any time if anyone has a concern or a recommendation to improve the school.

Schools were judged on a variety of factors, including the exterior and interior appearance of the campus, the way people were treated in person and over the telephone, and the information and programs available for families and visitors. Specific items that judges evaluated on their site visits included:

Outside

Clearly marked visitor parking spaces near the front door.

Well-kept grounds that are free of debris and trash.

Plainly marked entrances, particularly the main entrance door.

Front entrance/lobby

Clean and appealing lobby/front entrance.

"Welcome to our school" signs that clearly direct visitors to the main office.

Attractive, colorful displays of student achievement and school events.

Office

Clean and tidy front office.

Reading material about the school available for visitors.

Welcoming and professionally dressed staff who greet visitors promptly and quickly ask to offer assistance.

Visitor badges available.

Telephone

Telephones that are answered promptly (within three rings) and professionally.

Person answering the phone has basic, up-to-date information readily accessible.

Callers are put through to appropriate parties promptly.

2007 Red Carpet winners

District School

Aiken County Chukker Creek Elementary School

Aiken County Hammond Hill Elementary School

Aiken County Redcliffe Elementary School

Anderson District 5 Lakeside Middle School

Anderson District 5 McLees Elementary School

Anderson District 5 Midway Elementary School

Anderson District 5	T. L. Hanna High School
Beaufort County	Hilton Head High School
Beaufort County	Mossy Oaks Elementary School
Charleston County	Laurel Hill Primary School
Cherokee County	Alma Elementary School
Cherokee County	Corinth Elementary School
Cherokee County	Gaffney High School
Dorchester District 2	Knightsville Elementary School
Dorchester District 2	Newington Elementary School
Florence District 1	Delmae Heights Elementary School
Florence District 3	J. C. Lynch Elementary School
Florence District 3	Lake City Elementary School
Florence District 5	Johnsonville Middle School
Greenville County	Mauldin Elementary School
Hampton District 1	Wade Hampton High School
Horry County	Lakewood Elementary School
Kershaw County	Baron DeKalb Elementary School
Kershaw County	Bethune Elementary School
Kershaw County	Blaney Elementary School
Kershaw County	Camden High School
Kershaw County	Doby's Mill Elementary School
Kershaw County	Leslie M. Stover Middle School
Lexington District 1	Oak Grove Elementary School
Lexington District 2	R. H. Fulmer Middle School
Lexington/Richland District 5	Dutch Fork Middle School
Lexington/Richland District 5	Leaphart Elementary School
Oconee County	James M. Brown Elementary School
Oconee County	Seneca Middle School
Oconee County	Walhalla Elementary School
Oconee County	Walhalla High School
Oconee County	Walhalla Middle School
Pickens County	East End Elementary School
Richland District 2	Anna Boyd Child Development Center
Richland District 2	Bethel-Hanberry Elementary School
Richland District 2	Blythewood High School
Richland District 2	Blythewood Middle School
Richland District 2	Forest Lake Elementary School
Richland District 2	Joseph Keels Elementary School
Richland District 2	Kelly Mill Middle School
Richland District 2	Rice Creek Elementary School
Richland District 2	Richland Northeast High School
Rock Hill District 3	Bellevue Elementary School
Rock Hill District 3	Olde Pointe Elementary School
Spartanburg District 1	Campobello-Gramling Elementary School
Spartanburg District 2	Boiling Springs Elementary School
Spartanburg District 2	Oakland Elementary School

Spartanburg District 3 Cowpens Elementary School
Spartanburg District 3 Middle School of Pacolet
Spartanburg District 6 Dorman Freshman Campus
Sumter District 2 F. J. DeLaine Elementary School
Sumter District 2 Pocalla Springs Elementary School
Sumter District 17 Crosswell Drive Elementary School
Sumter District 17 Kingsbury Elementary School
Union County Monarch Elementary School
Williamsburg County W.M. Anderson Elementary School